



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Governor Signs Historic Education Bill to Teach Mental Health to Youth

Middle schools and high schools have been teaching about various health topics since the 1970s. The current State Education Law requires schools to provide instruction in topics such as the use and misuse of alcohol, tobacco, and substances and the early detection of cancer. Now, under new legislation signed by Governor Cuomo, mental health instruction will be added to the list of critical health issues that youth will learn about.

The new legislation, sponsored by Assemblywoman Cathy Nolan (D-Queens) and Senator Carl Marcellino (R-Nassau), passed with near unanimous support in the State Legislature. "This legislation represents a policy goal that the Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) has advocated for over the past five years" according to MHANYS' CEO Glenn Liebman. "We are celebrating the passage of this vital legislation on behalf of young people in New York and their families. By ensuring that young people are educated about mental health, we increase the likelihood that they will be able to recognize signs in themselves and others that indicate when help is needed and how to get help," Liebman said.

Some 20 percent of Americans will be diagnosed with a mental illness at some point in their lives, and about half of them will begin experiencing symptoms as early as 14 years of age. Too often, however, these signs are missed and young people go without treatment for years, often suffering academically, abusing alcohol and drugs, getting into legal trouble, and too often, tragically losing their lives to suicide. In the same way that people can be taught to recognize the early signs and symptoms of other illnesses and get the help they need, the same can be taught about mental illness according to proponents of the new law.

John Richter, Director of Public Policy at MHANYS, commented that "we possess the knowledge and tools necessary to increase awareness in young people about mental health, how to recognize when someone's in distress or crisis and how to get help. Why in the world would we withhold this lifesaving information from our youth?" In fairness, some schools have already taken the initiative to teach about mental health and suicide prevention, but these efforts have not been consistent across the state and many schools are unsure about their role and the appropriateness of teaching this subject matter. The new law will settle any ambiguity along these lines.

Advocates and many experts believe that teaching the facts about mental health and openly discussing the issues with students will lessen the stigma surrounding mental illnesses. Young people and their families would feel more comfortable seeking help, academic performance for all students would be enhanced, and ultimately, lives can be saved.

"This was a true grassroots effort driven by our members, thousands of people in the community and many of our colleague organizations," according to Liebman.

The new law becomes effective in July 2018. Schools will have until September of the same year when school resumes after the summer break to have curriculums and teachers in place ready to begin teaching about mental health.

Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) is a not-for-profit organization comprised of 26 affiliates in 52 counties throughout New York State. The mission of MHANYS is to promote mental health and recovery, eliminate discrimination, and raise public awareness with education and support.

Supporting Mental Health & Wellness in Schools



Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) works to end the stigma against mental illness and promote mental health wellness. MHANYS achieves this through training, education, advocacy and policy, community-based partnerships, and by connecting individuals and families to help.

In 2016, MHANYS successfully advocated for the passage of a law that requires schools to provide mental health education as part of the health curricula, and we are committed to supporting educators and schools through implementation. As students have a better understanding of their own mental health and that of their family and peers, MHANYS believes that it is imperative for educators to also have an understanding of mental health and wellness, for schools to be prepared to respond to the mental health needs of students, and for communities to work together to support access to mental health services and supports.

How can MHANYS support schools to meet the mental health needs of students?

- ⇒ **EDUCATE STUDENTS:** our *Mental Health and Wellness 101* for students combines lecture and experiential learning activities. Topics include understanding mental health along a continuum from wellness to illness; self-care and other wellness strategies; recovery and treatment seeking behavior; and anti-stigma messaging.
- ⇒ **TRAIN FACULTY AND STAFF:** our *Mental Health and Wellness 101* for educators includes a one hour training on mental health and wellness, with additional 30 minute training components that can be tailored to your needs (i.e. suicide prevention, trauma, school-based wellness initiatives). We also provide *ASIST: Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training*.
- ⇒ **COLLABORATE:** to build community partnerships that work to reduce stigma, support families, educate communities and support access to care.
- ⇒ **CONSULTATION/TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:** to work with key school personnel to develop strategies to promote wellness, educate students, provide staff development opportunities and identify community-based supports and resources.

For more information or to schedule a Mental Health and Wellness 101 training, please contact Amy Molloy, Director of Education, at amolloy@mhanys.org or 518.434.0439.

Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

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Recommendations for Mental Health Instruction in Schools

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Chapter 390 of the Laws of 2016, which amends Section 804 of Article 17 of the New York State Education Law, requires schools to begin providing instruction in mental health on or after the statute's effective date of July 1, 2018. The Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) recommends that curricula and lesson plans developed in accordance with the new law, and the legislative intent of the law, should:

- Assume a public health approach to teaching about mental health geared toward providing students with life-long skills and resources that transcend a young person's present role as a student. Such curricula should strive to equip students with knowledge about mental health so as to maximize each student's own mental wellness and the mental wellness of others, and instill an awareness of when and how to access treatment or other services as needed for oneself and others.
- The primary mental health educator(s) tasked with providing instruction about mental health should have a minimum of knowledge, education, and training in mental health consistent with the curriculum elements outlined in this guidance document.
- In addition to instruction provided by the primary mental health educator(s), curricula and lesson plans should draw upon and involve the participation of mental health experts, advocates, providers and recipients (past and/or present) of mental health services from the general community outside the school itself.
- **Not** have as learning objectives teaching students to diagnose, treat or otherwise provide counseling to people with mental illness.

9 CORE CURRICULUM ELEMENTS

Core elements in school mental health curricula should include:

1. The concept of wellness (e.g., 8 dimensions of wellness) including self-care and personal responsibility for one's own mental health and wellness.
2. The concept of mental health as an integral part of health.
3. The recognition of the signs and symptoms of developing mental health problems.
4. Instruction in the awareness and management of mental health crises such as the risk of suicide, self-harm and other mental health crises.
5. The relationship between mental health, substance use and other negative coping behaviors.
6. The negative impact of stigma and cultural attitudes toward mental illness on treatment seeking behavior and as a contributing factor in discrimination against people with mental illnesses.
7. The concept of recovery from mental illness.
8. The implications of risk factors, protective factors and resiliency on wellness, mental health and recovery.
9. Instruction in identifying appropriate professionals, services and family/social supports for treating and maintaining recovery from mental illness.